
SOUTHEAST OHIO
WINTER 2012
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RAISING BUCKEYES
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editor's letter

Diversity. That's who pulls up a chair to the dinner table in Appalachia. A region rich in community with a vibrant culture, the people and stories rival any found in the country.

Southeast Ohio has driven the winding county roads through the hills and to the edge of the Ohio River, meeting new faces along the way.

With each face comes a new story that entertains us in between courses of home-cooked meals, whether at Pomeroy's Wild Horse Cafe (page 2) or McConnelsville's Boondocks BBQ (page 42).

For those nights out, we head to the bar to see The Whipps take the stage. These country rappers (page 8), whose album *Ghettobillies* breaks through into the new genre of hick-hop, mix the eclectic sounds of a banjo and synthesizer.

Back at home throughout the region, you won't find mothers and wives confined to the kitchen. Rather, they are throwing elbows at practice for the Hell Betties all-female roller derby team (page 22), driving between football practices and games for three all-star sons (page 29) or maintaining strength at home while their husbands go to work below ground in the coal mines (page 14).

Even dog bowls have a story to tell, as seen at Pickaway County's new dog shelter (page 18)—a result of community members' fundraising efforts. This pride and compassion also shows in local officials such as Middleport's mayor who doubles as an Underground Railroad tour guide (page 36).

These stories have come to life thanks to the efforts and talents of our writers, editors, designers and photographers, who collaborated successfully to merge vivid photography with solid reporting.

In the following pages, discover the diversity and acquaint yourself with the familiar faces of Southeastern Ohio.

Douglas Bair
Editor in Chief

on the cover

In full derby gear, Rena Loebker, also an Athens baker, is a member of the Appalachian Hell Betties roller derby team. Shot by photographer Patrick Oden.

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A pristine statue reflects the elegance of A Georgian Manner Bed & Breakfast. Photographed by Kate Munsch.

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Food with a View

Southwest cuisine finds a home in Pomeroy cafe

Written by
Daniella Limoli

Photographed by
Meg Vogel

Where State Highway 124 meets the coffee-with-cream-colored Ohio River, the stoplight beckons right to the region's most popular restaurant that almost never was: the Wild Horse Cafe.

The statue of a rearing bay stallion stands its post while a trail of horseshoes leads to the entrance. A grinning hostess greets you underneath the Pledge of Allegiance encircled in a halo of heeled cowgirl boots and rope. The place reeks of the Southwest, and that is not just the tang of homemade tortilla chips.

Every wall is covered in horse blankets, barbed wire, chaps and signs that advertise services like, "Horses boarded, fed and groomed 85 cents."

The intricately carved mahogany bar is as sturdy as an old draft horse.

Hanging on the adjacent wall is an autographed, one-of-a-kind photograph of Chief Daniel Tailbird who wrote, "To Horace and all my other paleface 'friends.'"

Horace Karr, owner of the Wild Horse Cafe, is sitting nearby in the main dining room where booths and tables seat up to 206 guests. All but three of the tables in the Wild Horse offer a view of the churning Ohio River through the high windows.

Horace says that the notion for the restaurant came from his late wife, Dorothy, when they had to drive 30 to 40 minutes to find a nice meal. When the property by the river came up for sale, they snatched it up even when the demographics of Meigs County told Horace that there were not enough people to support a restaurant of this caliber. However, he could not say no to Dorothy, and they broke ground in 2002.

But when Dorothy suddenly died in March of 2003, just six months before she would

ABOVE: Wild Horse Cafe owner Horace Karr poses for a portrait in the main dining room of his Southwest-themed restaurant in Pomeroy.

have seen her dream come to fruition, Horace almost halted the project. It was only after the persistence of his four adult children that he continued with construction.

"There have been so many good things happen about this. Dorothy and I had both agreed when we started on it we didn't care if it made us a dime. We just hoped that it didn't cost us a fortune. And so far we've been lucky enough to do that."

That success has come just as much from the view as the food. With no famous dish in particular to speak of, the restaurant sticks to what it knows—southwest cooking. It also offers some local options, like tomatoes in the summer and even beef from registered red Angus owned by his youngest son, Tom. Up to 65 guests can chow down on fajitas and complimentary corn chips while reclining on the patio and scanning the horizon. More adventurous guests simply dock their boats and follow the wooden walkway to the restaurant.

Horace says that even the late Bob Evans and his wife Jewell stopped in several times when the cafe opened its doors in 2003. Bob admitted that he had lived on the Ohio River his entire life and had never witnessed a view like the one he got at the Wild Horse. He told Horace, "Your waitresses are wonderful, your food's excellent. But I want to tell you young man, if you don't cut down on your servings you're going to go broke." When recounting the tale, Horace bursts into laughter and his smile shows a much younger man.

General manager Dave Berry has worked for Horace from the beginning.

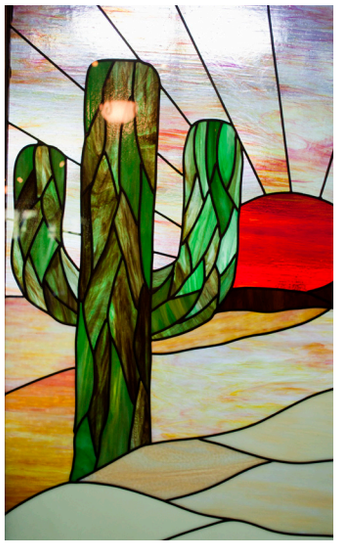
"We've got stuff on our menu that between eating and having a pop and tipping your server you can be out of here for $12 a person and more than likely have food left over," Dave says. "(We're) just trying to give them the best service that we can possibly give them and the best product that we can possibly deliver."

Front-of-the-house manager and server Teresa Simpson has been waiting tables at the restaurant for five years.

"Everybody's really nice and they're really good people to work for," Teresa says sweetly. "(Horace) always takes good care of us."

Horace quickly admits that the realization of the Wild Horse Cafe came less from logic and more from an unwillingness to say no. And he never stops talking about Dorothy, the one who pushed for the impractical.

"You're lucky, but you also have to take the chance sometimes to make things happen," he says, gazing out the window to that winding river. □



FROM TOP LEFT: Horace Karr's daughter-in-law helped decorate the interior of the restaurant with authentic Southwestern pieces, such as the desert-scene stained glass window that illuminates the entrance doors and the cowboy boot lamps that light every booth.

Wild Horse Cafe offers Chicken Salad with fresh chicken, roasted red peppers, crisp greens, tomatoes, cucumber, red onion, bacon and cheese.

Mind Your Manors

Bed and Breakfast brings back Southern charm

Written by
Erica Euse

Photographed by
Kate Munsch

Overlooking Hocking County's Lake Logan sits an antiquated white mansion, home to A Georgian Manner Bed & Breakfast.

With its blue shutters and red doors, this colonial getaway mirrors a Southern plantation. Massive white columns encircle the front porch, adorned with rocking chairs for guests to take in the lush scenery at the mansion's front steps.

ABOVE: Civil War artifacts decorate A Georgian Manner Bed & Breakfast.

BELOW: The Manner overlooks Lake Logan.

The interior exudes the same Southern charm. Each room, decorated by owner B.J. King, is full of rich red hues and dark woods. Common areas like the library are ornamented with statues and knick-knacks from his travels abroad and with Civil War-era collectibles, including a gun formerly carried by Robert E. Lee.

Each artifact is accompanied by a small piece of paper that reveals its historical significance. The five bedrooms that are available to guests have individual themes, including the Crystal Rose and Queen Mary suites, both true reflections of B.J.'s love for the antebellum South.

B.J. purchased the land in 1995 and began a seven-year renovation on what was originally a small 1840s farmhouse. He fashioned the Manner after the Kappa Sigma fraternity house in Charlottesville, Virginia, that was later replicated by his alma mater chapter at Ohio State University.

Its southern romantic theme attracts honeymooners and newlyweds, even from beyond southeastern Ohio.

Donna Welch, who has been employed at the Manner for five years, estimates 125 outdoor weddings have taken place during her time there.

"Everybody is happy when they are here. People with different backgrounds always find something in common," Donna says.

B.J. wanted to open a B&B because of the more personal connection guests often share with the owners.

"We always had a better time because of getting to know the owners and learning about the area from them," B.J. says.

Each night at the Manner, Donna prepares a communal dinner that she serves to guests in the dining room. Here, B.J. and wife Lynda can be found entertaining and sharing stories.

Unlike a hotel or inn, the Manner creates a homelike atmosphere that is welcoming and relaxing, yet it allows for privacy.

Not only can visitors take in the beauty of the surrounding areas, but they can also experience a historic journey through the romantic South. □

History Does Hard Time

Noble County converts local jailhouse to modern museum

Written by
Tylah Deal

Photographed by
Heather Rousseau

Rays of morning sunlight brighten the hallway she crosses to wake and dress the children. After breakfast, they head to school and she goes to work in the prison, where she earns 65 cents a day. Conveniently, the prison is home.

During the late 1800s, Noble County's sheriff and his family lived in the prison where his wife served as the matron for prisoners.

Cells were placed throughout the home alongside bedrooms, a family room and kitchen. Many criminals called the three-story late Victorian home, including famous serial killer Thomas Lee Dillan.

In 1977, Sheriff Landon T. Smith's family was the last to reside in the jail after his 37 years of service.

Although the jail closed in 1998 due to expensive maintenance and technology needs, Judy Richter, president of the Noble County Historical Society, says there was an urgency to "preserve the history of the community."

With local residents' donations, historical society membership dues and fundraisers, the 129-year-old jail reopened in 2002 as the restored Noble County Historic Jail Museum and Information Center.

A petite woman wearing a colorful flower-patterned, 18th-century patron's dress hugs visitors with a sincere smile.

Joy M. Flood, a grandmother of 10 and great-grandmother of one, manages the museum.

She finds the thought of raising a family and housing perpetrators under the same roof terrifying.

"At the time it was common, but I couldn't imagine," Joy says.

Today, instead of prisoners, the building houses a bookcase from the Civil War, vintage clothing, military uniforms, furniture, agricultural tools and medical equipment.

Some artifacts date back to the county's founding in 1851.

The medical equipment, which belonged to Dr. Charles F. Thompson, a native whom locals proudly name, sits in a cell adorned with pictures and writings honoring his professional success.

He is known for his contribution to the development of Similac baby formula, as well as delivering the largest baby at the time, a newborn weighing in at 17 pounds, 2 ounces.

Beyond his accomplishments, the cell also reflects the community pride that the museum hopes to instill within its visitors.

"I want people to understand how proud we are of Noble County and for them to be proud of the heritage as well," Beth Sailing, a Jail Museum volunteer, says. "It's not only a museum for what we have in it, but it's a museum of the building."

Profit isn't the museum's goal. Rather, it focuses on preserving history.

"We don't expect to get rich. We don't want to get rich," Joy says. "We preserve." □

ABOVE: Jail Museum manager Joy M. Flood shows off some of the exhibits housed in Caldwell's historic jail.

Paranormal Investigators

Hunting what goes bump in the night

Written by
Dean Wright

Photographed by
Gwen Titley

ABOVE: Paranormal investigators Michelle Duke and Tom Robson discuss plans for the theater search.

BELOW: Tom Robson reviews recorded sound bytes, searching for lower sound frequencies often missed by the human ear.

A walkie-talkie crackles as one of the ghost-busting team members "tags" a movement, a technique used to label sound causes. Tom thinks he hears something after Michelle sneezes, and he points. A shadow moves in the dark as this duo in black pushes into the open abyss of the Cambridge Performing Arts Centre's auditorium in Guernsey County.

Southeastern Ohio Paranormal Investigators (SEOPI), a nonprofit organization based out of Zanesville, makes a mission of uncovering what lurks in the shadows. Is it a tree scratching a child's window or the fingernails of some phantasmal entity? They seek the truth.

With nearly 30 years of combined investigation experience between them, SEOPI founders Michelle Duke and Tom Robson lead a group of 12 individuals. Michelle and Tom live as neighbors and work beside each other at the Zanesville Police Department. Their organization wields an arsenal of technology, including infrared night vision cameras, audio recorders, electromagnetic field detectors, motion detection sensors and the five human senses.

"We're not just trying to get scared. We're trying to find answers that people don't have," Tom says. "I believe [in paranormal activity]." He handles his gear meticulously with broad hands, making sure every camera lens is clear.

SEOPI aided the Cambridge Performing Arts Centre in spring of 2011, attempting to discover the origins of unaccounted disturbances around the auditorium. Kitrina Mazaher, president of the nonprofit theater's board, participated in the ghost hunt.

"(SEOPI) were very good about explaining what they were going to do, the equipment that they used and how they actually ran the investigation," Kitrina says.

Kitrina often comes to the theater after work to eat before rehearsals. She typically sits in the front row alone and frequently hears noises as if someone is entering the front of the auditorium and sitting a row behind her. After she checks, no one is there.

With SEOPI present, she repeats this process. One of their electromagnetic field detectors lights up whenever she attempts conversation with the suspected presence, a sign of paranormal commotion.

The investigators' evidential reveal of the theater did conclude the presence of paranormal activity, which is not common for their clientele. This leads one to wonder what else might lurk at other historical sites. SEOPI hopes for the chance to investigate additional places in Ohio and bring these mysteries out of the dark. □

Sorghum Scholar

Scioto man preserves a sweet tradition

Written by
Lynsie Dickerson

Photographed by
Will Parson

John Simon specializes in Appalachian culture. He earned his doctorate at Ohio University in 1987 and went on to teach culture and music, among other subjects, as his book, *Cowboy Copas and the Golden Age of Country Music*, illustrates.

As a teacher, he is preserving a unique aspect of the culture: sorghum-making.

Last fall marked the 30th Annual John R. Simon's Sorghum Festival, held at his fifth-generation family farm in West Portsmouth. Simon bought his sorghum-making machinery and process from a neighbor, Elbert Hackworth, who was retiring from the trade.

Made from sorghum cane rather than sugar cane, sorghum was the main sweetener during the 19th century, primarily in the Midwestern and Southern states.

"Making sorghum is a traditional behavior," Simon says. "People take pride in keeping alive behaviors that helped our country when it was forming."

Sorghum-making is a time-consuming process, but it yields a sweet result. At the end of April, the seeds that grow on the top of the sorghum cane stalks are planted.

The juice-filled stalks may grow to nearly 12 feet tall. To test the ripeness, Simon tastes the stalk's juice.

"It gets riper every day, and therefore it gets sweeter every day," he says.

In September when the stalks are ripe, the leaves are stripped away and the tops of the stalks are removed.

"It takes a lot of manpower to make sorghum," says Simon. He finds the fieldwork to be the most difficult part.

Eventually, the stalks are cut and brought to the mill, where they are put through large rollers that squeeze out the juice. The juice then runs into a long stainless steel pan on top of a wood fire. As it cooks, the water evaporates and leaves a thicker, golden syrup. A wagonload of sorghum cane stalks will make about seven to 12 gallons of syrup, which is then poured into buckets and jars.

The final product can be used in a variety of ways, including atop biscuits and pancakes, mixed with baked beans and to make sorghum lollipops.

More than just a way to produce a sweetener, sorghum-making enables Simon to share his love of old-fashioned Appalachia with others. □

ABOVE: John Simon continues to organize the annual Sorghum Festival, first held on his fifth-generation Scioto County farm in 1981.

BELOW: Stirring the bubbling sorghum requires a solid, old-fashioned paddle.

Country Rappers

Hick-hop band whipps the region

Written by
Kim Amedro

Photographed by
Kaitlyn Bernauer

ABOVE: The Whipps, (from left to right) Ed Price, Eric Daniels, Greg Fletcher, Larry Collinsworth and Don Hanshaw pose for a portrait oustide Judd Plaza in Ashland, Kentucky.

Dressed in embroidered black button-up shirts, dark worn jeans and boots, they sing about life in the back woods and lovin'—country style. Guitars, drum loops and vocal stylings echo the pop country scene. Banjo, mandolin and dobro reflect Appalachian heritage. But, occasionally these Greenup County, Kentucky, boys pick up a synthesizer and drop a beat.

Meet The Whipps. Their style: hick-hop.

The band consists of founder and lead singer Don Hanshaw, guitarist Larry Collinsworth, bassist Eric Daniels, bassist Ed Price and drummer Greg Fletcher. They formed in 2008 after a mutual friend introduced Don and Larry, and they released their debut album, *Ghettobillies*, in early 2010.

"To me, ghettobilly is an economic statement," Larry says. "You have one foot in the backwoods and one foot in the urban area."

Occasionally, they trade their banjo and boots for some auto-tune and Adidas. However, they are still working to define themselves within this new crossbreed of music. Eric describes their version of the genre-mixing movement as a lyrical balance between country-influenced rap and rap-infused country.

"If that makes sense," he adds with a laugh.

Don believes music has simply evolved, and they are evolving with it.

"Ten years ago, you call someone a redneck and you'd get punched in the face," he says. "Music evolves with the times. You see a lot of the younger generation listening to rap and hip-hop, but they're still listening to Hank Williams Jr."

It's this laidback persona that defines The Whipps' stage presence. Eric has no problem hopping off the stage and playing bass on the dance floor. Don, whose classic, gruff country voice dynamically switches from twang to rap-slang, improvises birthday songs during their gigs in local bars.

As a fan's review of *Ghettobillies* on cdbaby.com notes, "They are party songs that make me wanna put on my mini skirt and cowboy boots and go out trawlin' for trailer trashy boys."

Recently, their song "Giddy Up" inspired the choreography for the first place line dance in the 2011 Music City Country Dance Challenge in Nashville.

"(Pat Esper) found our song 'Giddy Up' online and made a dance to it," Eric explains. "He has a YouTube video that actually teaches the dance."

Don says that as long as fans keep coming around with homemade band tees that sport phrases such as "I just got whipped and I liked it," The Whipps will continue touring. □

LEFT: Bassist Eric Daniels strums his bass during an outside performance.

BELOW: Drummer Greg Fletcher keeps the beat for his band members.

Mightier than the Sword

More than a century ago, the writings of a New Lexington native freed a nation

Written by
Christopher Uihlein

Photographed by
Ross Brinkerhoff

ABOVE: Carma Jean Rausch and Barbara Mooney have been working to promote the memory of local hero Januarius MacGahan for 33 years.

Januarius Aloysius MacGahan seemed the least likely person to free a war-torn nation from the grips of the world's largest empire. But for the people of New Lexington, MacGahan's life fostered a legacy worth celebrating and honoring.

MacGahan was born in June of 1844 to immigrant farmers in what was then known as Pigeon Roost Ridge by local townspeople. His father died when he was 6 years old, leaving him to help his mother run the farm. From an early age he aspired to write. Before his death in 1878, his writing would be so authoritative as to change the map of the world, influencing governments and ultimately earning him the title "The Liberator of Bulgaria."

An adept student, MacGahan is said to have read every book in his neighborhood by the age of 18. It was at this time that he applied to be a district schoolmaster, according to Carma Jean Rausch, chair of the American-Bulgarian Foundation.

Rausch, who happened upon the 1978 centennial festival in honor of his death, instantly

His graphic description of the horrors he witnessed were so disturbing, he single-handedly swayed the British government from aiding the Turks in their quest to quell the Bulgarian uprisings.

became aware of the need for preserving MacGahan's memory. Once unaware of his accomplishments, Rausch has become a local authority on the Liberator of Bulgaria's life.

Barbara Mooney, treasurer of the MacGahan American Bulgarian Foundation, says it's not uncommon for locals to be unaware of their former community member's achievements. Together, they have sought to change that.

Mooney and Rausch have proudly championed the MacGahan American-Bulgarian Foundation for 33 years, hosting the festival and offering scholarships to local high school seniors who honor his legacy through scholastic pursuits.

After working as a teacher and part-time freelance writer for *The Huntington Democrat*, MacGahan grew weary of his work in America, and aspired to travel abroad. His bookish, mild-mannered nature did not impede him from befriending strong contacts with the *London Daily News.* By 1873, he had begun supplying the newspaper with a steady stream of wartime accounts from the front line.

"He was an adventurer," Mooney says. "The words just jump right off the paper when you read about the atrocities of the Turkish Army."

The atrocities, which included the slaughtering of entire villages and resulted in approximately 20,000 deaths, were considered outrageous by those on the international stage.

"The excerpts are extremely graphic, and they were sufficiently gory when they were published in the *London Daily* that people began to think 'what if this is true?'" Rausch says. "But it took some time to convince people."

Verification of MacGahan's report quickly came to light, casting a dark shadow on the Turk army. His graphic description of the horrors he witnessed were so disturbing, he single-handedly swayed the British government from aiding the Turks in their quest to quell the Bulgarian uprisings. A long-time ally to the Turks, the British government's refusal to aid them led to their defeat in Bulgaria, and to the creation of a liberated Bulgarian state.

With the uprisings and revolutions of today becoming almost commonplace, one can understand the importance of a writer's voice shining light on the truth in the name of freedom.

Bulgaria has always been a free state as far as anyone living is concerned. But the defeat of the Turks in Bulgaria, a country roughly the size of Ohio, predicted the eventual fall of the Ottoman Empire.

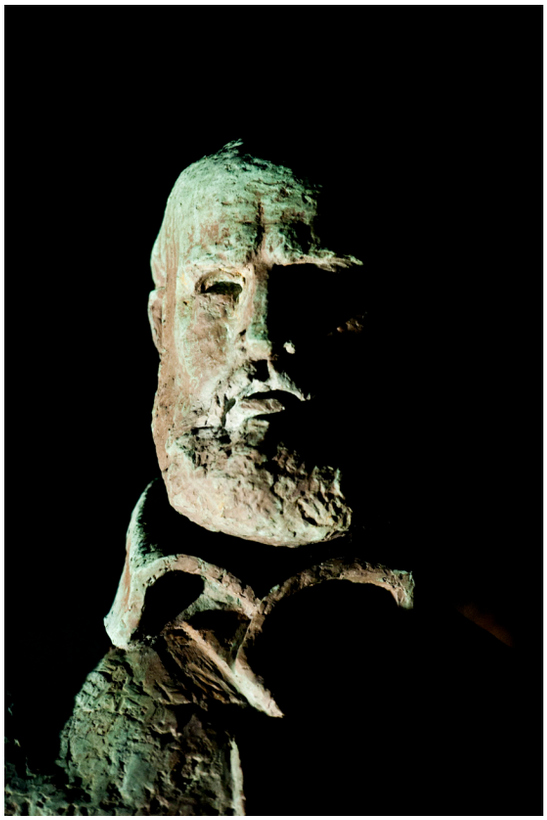
Unfortunately, several problems have recently beset the foundation from spreading the awareness of Bulgaria's liberator. Several donors have died in recent years, threatening the life of their scholarship. Rausch also notes it's especially hard to foster appreciation of a 19th century writer in rural America.

Despite this, one can immediately tell through their fervor that Rausch and Mooney will forever root for Januarius MacGahan, their hometown hero. Every June the number of attendees continues to grow at the festival.

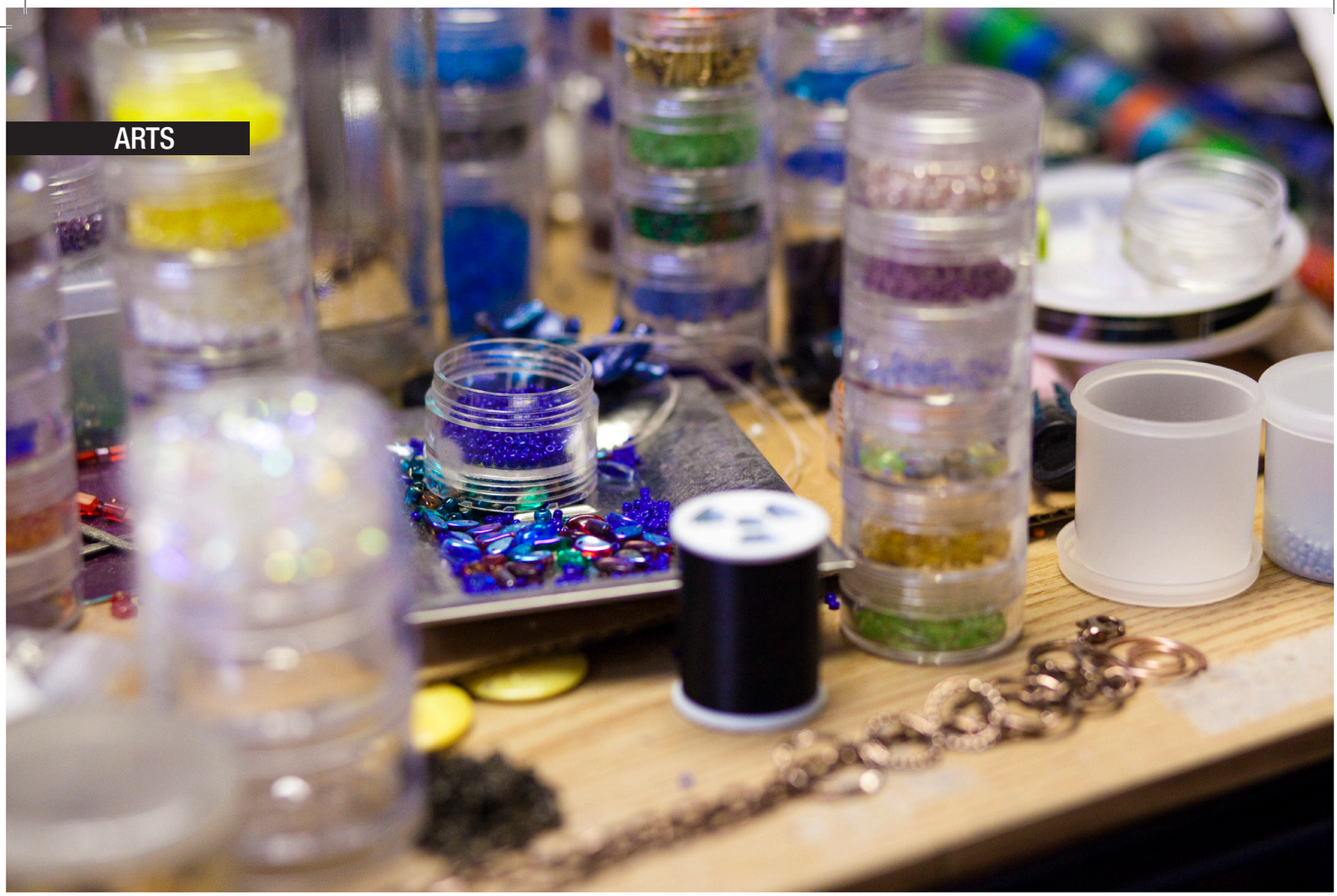
In 2009, guests of the festival were honored with a visit from the vice president of Bulgaria, Angel Marin, who gave the Perry County District Library soil from the churchyard in Batak, Bulgaria, where a majority of the atrocities occurred. A symbol of MacGahan's triumphs, the soil is one of many prized possessions held in the cases dedicated to MacGahan.

The festivities always include visiting MacGahan's grave site in the beautiful Maplewood Cemetery. But on the walk from the church, guests always pass by the statue of a hero, standing outside the Perry County courthouse, his larger-than-life effigy armed with a pen and paper.

Regardless of MacGahan's unknown status among many in the county, much less the world, his legacy is honored by those who remember the Liberator of Bulgaria, the man who overcame the adversity of a modest upbringing, used his talents to excel in his field, and brought peace to people in faraway lands. □



ABOVE: The statue of Januarius MacGahan stands outside the Perry County Courthouse. The journalist, born in New Lexington in 1844, influenced the outcome of the Russian-Turkish War, earning him the title "The Liberator of Bulgaria."



Kaleidoscope

Crafting stained glass in a new light

Written by
Alisa Caton

Photographed by
Alex Stein

ABOVE: Beads, string and colorful glass cover artist Cathy Painter's workshop table.

Lamps, candlesticks, silverware, beads and colored glass clutter artist Cathy Painter's basement workshop at her home in Ashland, Kentucky. They may soon become the next addition to a stained glass work.

Cathy, a southern California native, has been creating stained glass for the past 39 years, and her famous kaleidoscopes for 20. Her artwork started with a simple fascination.

"I've always admired church windows, and so I took a class in my twenties for stained glass," Cathy says.

She tried other types of art, but nothing came as easily as stained glass.

"I took right to it," Cathy says. "Nothing stayed with me like stained glass did."

The craft started as a hobby, with Cathy only making works for her friends and family. It did not take long for her work to take off professionally.

In 1986, Cathy moved to Fort Walton Beach, Florida, and began working for a stained glass studio, "The Glas Haus." The next year, Cathy opened "A Touch of Glass," her own studio in Destin, Florida. She was able to take her work internationally, as her husband was stationed on an Air Force base in Germany in 1989. After another move back to Florida, Cathy finally found her current home in Ashland in 1997.

Although Cathy has established a successful business, her work is not always for sale. One step into her home shows a room illuminated by stained glass windows and lamps.

One special lamp containing 2,000 pieces sits on a table right inside the door. Cathy crafted the lamp for her husband while living in Germany during the three months he was away serving in the Gulf War.

"I wanted to get it done before he got home,

so I worked at it everyday," Cathy says.

Of all the pieces she has made, Cathy says absolutely none are alike. She goes to antique stores and flea markets to find different pieces to add to kaleidoscopes. One of the works in her shop even has a little, silver rhinestone frog to complete the piece. She never goes out with any particular material in mind; anything that catches her eye will work.

"My eye will tell me when I find it. I can see the finished product before it's finished," Cathy says. "A broken candlestick that nobody else wants, I will buy."

Cathy makes a wide range of themed kaleidoscopes, most by request from her customers. She has created kaleidoscopes out of cameras, minature sailboats, trucks, airplanes and lighthouses.

"Customers bring me their own items, and they want me to incorporate them into the kaleidoscopes, and I do," Cathy says. "People can bring me anything and I make it work."

Something could be in her stock of antiques for a year before she uses it for a piece. All of Cathy's pieces begin as an original design on paper, which becomes the blueprint for the work. She then cuts the colored glass over this design to create the final product.

"I keep it lying around and I get inspired. The mind knows what I want to do," Cathy says.

Cathy says she makes around 500 to 600 kaleidoscopes a year, which she sells at five galleries and three or four shows she attends annually. Galleries that carry her art are spread from Cincinnati to Louisville, including her current home of Ashland.

Libby Varner, an employee at Aladdin's Art Gallery in Ashland, says that Cathy's work is a popular item at the store.

"We do have people come in specifically for it," Libby says. "Everyone that comes in and looks at it really likes it because it is so unique."

Even some celebrities have a piece of Cathy's work. Her friend, Vicki, wore one of Cathy's creations to a book signing by Priscilla Presley, who asked Vicki about the necklace and where she could get one.

"It makes you feel good when people come to you saying, 'I saw your work and I want you to make some for me,'" Cathy says.

Cathy's work costs anywhere from $35 to $300. Her hope is that everyone can purchase a piece.

"I want it to be affordable for the person. I want everyone to own one, not say, 'Oh, I wish I had one,'" Cathy says.

The stained glass work that Cathy creates is much more than a way to make money. Cathy is no longer a 20-year-old with a fascination for stained glass. Instead, she is a woman in her 60s with an established clientele.

"I don't do it for a living," Cathy says. "I do it because I love it." □

BELOW LEFT: Two of Cathy Painter's intricate kaleidoscopes.

BELOW RIGHT: Sunlight highlights the designs within a stained glass window that Cathy created for her home.

BELOW CENTER: Cathy spends hours at her work station, crafting art from glass.

Married to the Mines

Written by
Lauren McGrath

Photographed by
Laura McDermott
Patrick Oden

Coal miners' wives live a complex life behind the scenes. Only those who have lived with the fear, the waiting and, at best, soot-stained kitchen floors fully understand it. Alice Kozma and Judy Martin, whose husbands worked the mines for decades, share their stories here.

Alice Kozma extends her smooth right hand and introduces herself as "Silly Sally." Barely standing 5-foot tall, Alice prefers Sally instead of her birth name. She has a full head of white hair and is never without red lipstick. This 94-year-old, dressed in her blue slacks and matching button-up, has little difficulty moving around, but keeps a cane handy for when she goes out.

Born and raised a farmer's daughter in Morgan County, Sally knew coal miners drank whiskey and ate beans; that was her perception. However, that changed when she became a caretaker for a school-friend's family ill with pneumonia in Millfield where she met her future husband, a coal miner. While she watched over the family, a car repeatedly passed. Her friend explained that the car belonged to Bert Kozma, and he wanted to meet Sally. Soon after, they started dating and were together some 60 years until his death.

Opting out of formal education, Bert chose a

ABOVE: A neighbor of Sally Kozma found an old memorial sign of the Millfield mine disaster that now hangs on the shed at the front of her property.

career in coal mining at 15 years old. However, he could not quit school before turning 16, so he stayed in school for two months until his birthday in 1929. Bert continued to work in the mines for 36 years before retiring in 1976.

Prior to marrying Sally in March 1941, Bert took her to see a plot of land in Millfield that he admired known as College Hill. Sally jokes that if she had not liked the land, he would have found another lady. Sally's witty sense of humor was a great match for Bert, and luckily she liked the area as much as he did, so he purchased it from the bank. When he showed Sally the deed, she was surprised to see that he not only purchased College Hill but an additional 100 acres.

"Bert was lucky he got me, wasn't he?" Sally says.

They moved in June, and soon fell into the pattern of the coal mining life. Sally cooked, maintained the farm and took care of all household needs with Bert away in the mines.

"I was always against women working because I said all you had to do was cut down on your wishes, and you'd have enough to get along on your needs," Sally says.

Aside from housework, Sally would help Bert with coal mining. Bert was responsible for going to every man's house and telling him to come to work that day since there was no way to quickly reach the other coal miners. He had a history of falling asleep—even crashing—while driving, so Sally drove him around to tell the men to come to work that day. It was one way she showed her loyalty and commitment to her husband.

Bert was drafted during World War II, and was sent to Miami Beach for basic training before transferring to Gulfport Field, Mississippi. He worked in the mess hall as one of five apprentice bakers, where he mostly made cobblers for the 2,000 men on base.

"When we were married, if I coaxed him on a Sunday morning, he'd get up and make coffee. That was the extent of his cooking," Sally laughs.

Encouraged by the bank to get a job and help pay the mortgage while Bert was away, Sally rejoined her love in Mississippi and applied for a driving job on base to pay for their $22 monthly house payment. Sally drove more than 200 miles each day between taking the trash to the county dumpster, going back and forth from storage and picking up supplies. Eventually, they both returned to Millfield on December 23, 1945.

BELOW: Sally Kozma shows off photos and reminisces about her late husband, Bert.

The story of a coal wife does not begin or end with Sally but rather includes generations of women who have stood by the men they love. Whether it meant moving around to find work in the mines or praying for the safe return of their husband at night, coal miners' wives have to remain forever optimistic.

Judy Martin has lived and breathed coal mining for all 58 years of her life. She was raised into a coal miner's family in the coal mining town of Welch, West Virginia. The company store, a staple in coal mining towns, was still in operation during her time in an area of Welch known as Hemphill. Her father, grandfathers and great-grandfathers were all coal miners, so it was a lifestyle Judy was accustomed to by the time she married her husband, John.

"[My mother] was raised in that kind of environment, same way I married into it. It's funny, I think it runs in families like it's a tradition. Like when they were building the railroads, they'd come across it, they worked for the company, they'd have kids and the kids would work for the company," Judy says.

With short, curly hair and a full face, Judy is a woman filled with courage and positivity. Her journey through life as a coal wife has not been easy, but she continues to take every day in stride and hope for the best.

Although he is now retired from mining, 59-year-old John began working in the mines in 1976 and continued for a total of 19 years.

"He loves being a coal miner. It's like a family unit. You work with these men and you create a bond with these people," Judy says.

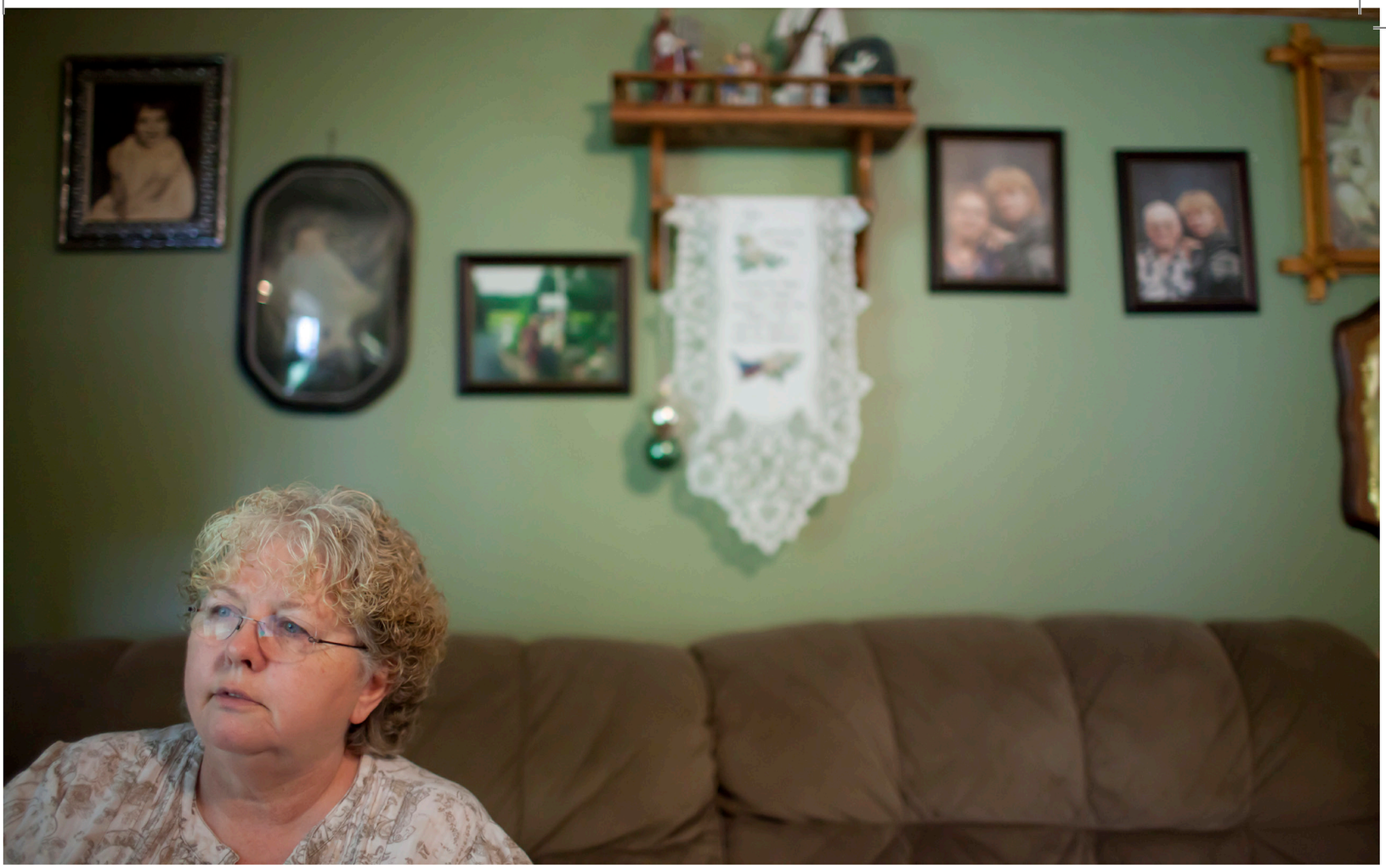
Their first child, John, was born in 1975 followed by his little brother Charlie in 1977. It was tough for the family to have two young children while John was working a dangerous job.

"I was 30 years younger; you don't think about what if he dies, what am I going to do?" Judy says. "It was hard raising two boys because he worked midnights, so he wasn't as involved with his sons the first several years of their lives because that's all he did was work. He was just like me. I was doing my thing; he was doing his thing and providing for the family."

While the pay was good, and John was close with his co-workers, mining still caused the family a lot of concern over John's safety. In 1986, John was trapped in an underground mine explosion while working for Southern Ohio Coal Company, and rescuers saved him from the rubble.

"I survived the midnight phone call and rushing to the hospital, not knowing how severe he was. I guess it's just something that you figure out how to deal with it and live with it. It's like any job," Judy says.

John certainly has the health problems of a coal miner. In addition to black lung, a respiratory dis-



ABOVE: Judy Martin, who was born into a coal mining family, looks out the window of her home in Athens.

ease that results from breathing in dust from coal over an extended period of time, he still suffers from back problems as an outcome of the underground explosion in 1986. John also has pain in his knees and feet as well as coal dust embedded in his cracked hands.

The money John earned as a coal miner beat the wages of any other job he could find. Because of that and his current lack of benefits, John is trying to get back into the mines.

"Being a coal miner, you have a lot of benefits that most jobs don't offer. High-risk jobs have excellent benefits," Judy explains.

At his current job, John is earning about a third of what he made in the mines. John is also without medical coverage, and Judy's coverage would be more affordable if he went back to mining. John's possible return to coal mining is not an easy move for the Martin family, but Judy understands and supports her husband's choice.

"I trust John. I know he's been through all the training, he's very level-headed, and he's not going to take a chance with his life," she says.

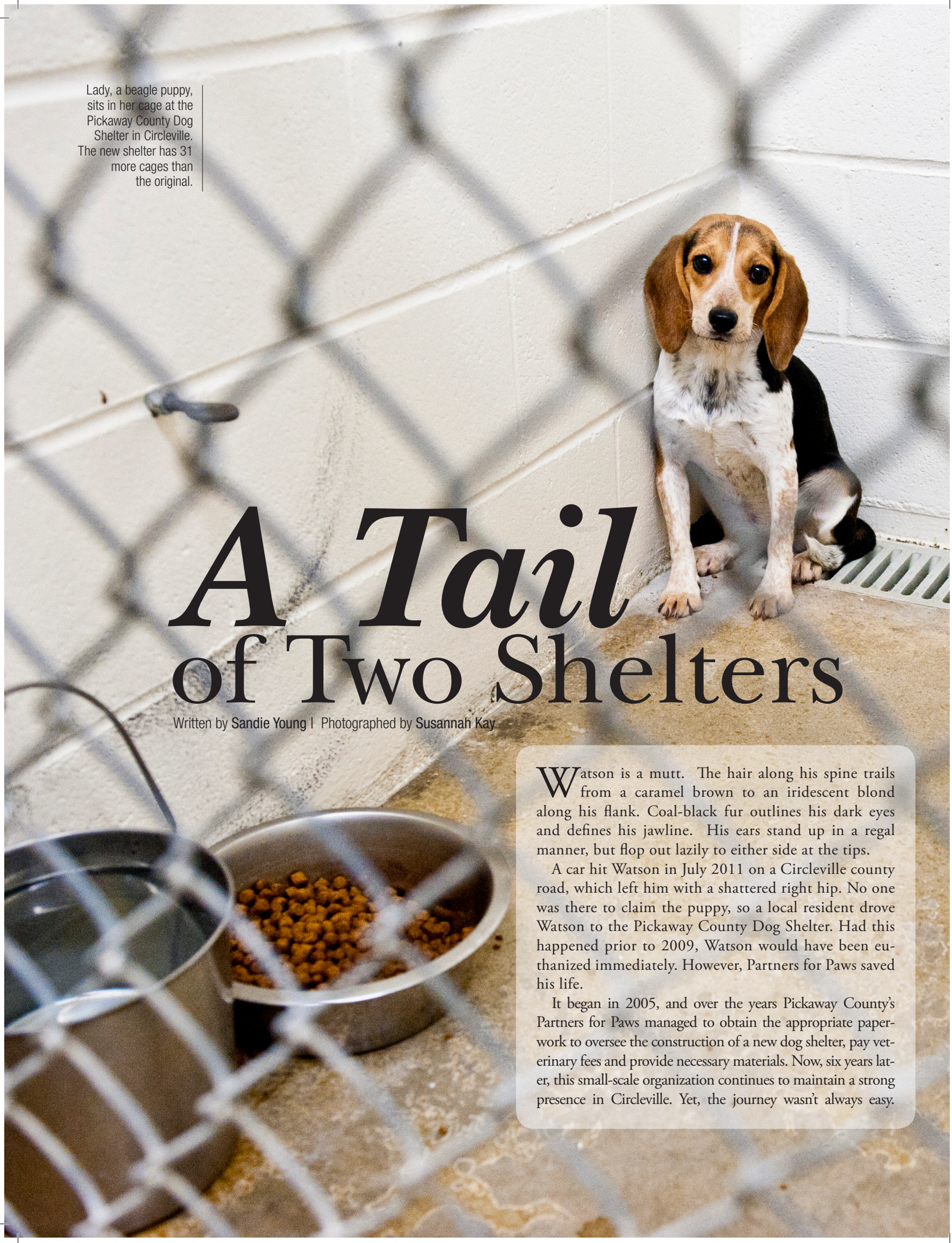
Although Sally and Judy lived through different decades of mining, the women share one similarity: the desire to keep busy. Judy cherishes the time she spends with her dog, Harley. During the warm weather, Judy and Harley take daily walks and relish in the landscapes. Before medical concerns prevented her from working, Judy earned a degree in Recreational Wildlife and Technology from Hocking Technical College (currently Hocking College). In the winter, Judy makes jewelry and other crafts, a hobby she shared with her late mother.

Despite losing Bert in 2005, Sally hasn't slowed down. She regularly attends church and travels to see family and friends. Even at 94, Sally continues to drive.

"People look at me and they say, 'Are you still driving?' and I say, 'Yes, you want me to drive circles around you and that car of yours?'"

Aside from their faith and positivity, both women have expressed the importance of preserving family histories. Sally and Judy have compiled family trees, biographies and stories in hard copies for future generations. Doing so also helps them remember days past and encourages younger generations to learn about their ancestors.

What seems like a risky and unpredictable profession to most is the life Sally and Judy have always known, a life they have always appreciated. Attempting to provide for their families, men endured the dangers of black lung, broken bones and even death. But behind the hardworking men stood the even harder working women. There was no promise that their husbands would return at the end of the workday, but the women kept their heads up and smiles on their faces. The life of a coal miner's wife is not easy, but it is full of rich history. □



Lady, a beagle puppy, sits in her cage at the Pickaway County Dog Shelter in Circleville. The new shelter has 31 more cages than the original.

A Tail of Two Shelters

Written by **Sandie Young** | Photographed by **Susannah Kay**

Watson is a mutt. The hair along his spine trails from a caramel brown to an iridescent blond along his flank. Coal-black fur outlines his dark eyes and defines his jawline. His ears stand up in a regal manner, but flop out lazily to either side at the tips.

A car hit Watson in July 2011 on a Circleville county road, which left him with a shattered right hip. No one was there to claim the puppy, so a local resident drove Watson to the Pickaway County Dog Shelter. Had this happened prior to 2009, Watson would have been euthanized immediately. However, Partners for Paws saved his life.

It began in 2005, and over the years Pickaway County's Partners for Paws managed to obtain the appropriate paperwork to oversee the construction of a new dog shelter, pay veterinary fees and provide necessary materials. Now, six years later, this small-scale organization continues to maintain a strong presence in Circleville. Yet, the journey wasn't always easy.

Before Partners for Paws, Pickaway County's dog shelter was inadequate. Linda Reeser, Partners for Paws treasurer and an original member, speaks in a concise yet confident manner as she remembers the old building. Her small frame and delicate features complement her refined confidence. Linda describes the previous shelter as "basically a one-car garage, and they had cages on either side of it."

Only nine cages housed the homeless canines, and at one point four dogs had to share a single cage. There was no air conditioning, and a dated heating system churned out warm air during the icy winters. An outdoor hose and one sink served as the only running water for filling the dog bowls.

At the time, the yearly euthanasia rate at the Pickaway County Dog Shelter had reached an estimated 80 percent. According to the ASPCA, the national euthanasia rate for sheltered dogs is 60 percent.

"They would keep (the dogs) for so many days, and they were so crowded they couldn't keep them any longer," Linda says.

The original shelter limped by for more than 50 years. Partners for Paws board member Robin Ash says that she would occasionally drive by the shelter, but she didn't have the stomach to go inside.

"It was bad; it looked bad," she says. "If you just kind of ignore it, maybe it will go away. It didn't. It was just like, Pickaway County can do better."

And so it did.

Partners for Paws co-founder and original president Jeanie McDowell says she "was on a mission to improve the facilities." As a child, Jeanie frequently walked over to the old shelter to fish with friends in a nearby pond. As Jeanie grew older, the shelter remained the same so she took action.

However, with such a large monetary responsibility, she couldn't do it alone. In 2005, Jeanie pitched her idea to a Pickaway County commissioner, Glenn Reeser. He agreed to lend his services, and quickly became the group's other co-founder, but Reeser knew funds were tight. He acknowledged that the community would need to foster a great deal of support to pay for the shelter.

Jeanie began the search for volunteers. Initially, she wrote a letter to the *Circleville Herald* explaining her ambitions and planned a meeting as the official launch for the new local hero, Partners for Paws.

"I was very pleased to see a number of people in this county become partners with me," Jeanie says. "I didn't do this by myself by any stretch of the imagination."

With ample volunteers but an empty bank account, the organization turned to fundraising. Glenn's wife, Linda, was among the first members, along with Robin and Jeanie. Linda says the first fundraising attempt was a rummage sale at the Emmett Chapel Church in 2006, which was "quite successful."

They did everything they "could possibly do to get a couple bucks," Robin says, from selling candy bars,T-shirts, pizza coupons, Avon and Tupperware to parking cars at the annual Circleville Pumpkin Show. They sat outside of Tractor Supply Company to collect donations, and they even set up a booth during the annual town antique tractor day. Sadly, it wasn't enough.

With the homeless pups in mind, they organized two large community events: a poker run and pet expo.

The pet expo included obedience and Red Cross demonstrations for pet CPR, baked goods and a two-hour clinic run by a veterinarian. Vendors from both brand name and local businesses also frequented the event, including bakers with homemade pet treats, groomers and an animal photographer. Expo-goers also gathered to adore the animals at the "cutest dog contest."

Another popular event, the poker run, had motorcycle engines roaring to life. Partners for Paws charged each bike $10 per rider.

With both events' successes, the money finally began to add up, and after three years of fundraising, Partners for Paws had collected $25,000. It was enough to officially break ground.

JoEllen Jacobs, current Partners for Paws president, has a contagious smile and the demeanor of a natural leader. A retired accountant, she joined the organization in early 2007 after several disappointing visits to the original shelter.

"They managed to do everything that could bring in a buck, all small scale, even the pet expo and the poker runs," JoEllen says. "And yet all of their efforts were able to accumulate enough to give the commissioners $25,000 to start this."

BELOW: Puppies play together at the new shelter.

Two hefty donations dramatically altered the local effort. Sheila and Drexel Poling, friends of the commissioner, had recently inherited a large sum of money, and after consideration, the couple graciously donated $90,000 for the new shelter.

Partners for Paws received another generous donation from the late Mary Virginia Crites-Hannan, whose inheritance was donated to the county for capital projects, says Glenn. The commissioners knew she valued her pets during her lifetime, so they donated a fraction of the money, $265,000, toward the new shelter.

"Basically this shelter was built on all gifted money; no taxpayer money went into building (it)," Linda says.

A small town ambition was becoming a clear and present reality. In late 2007, Partners for Paws obtained non-profit status. With a growing reputation and a large sum of cash, the group began plans for the new building. The commissioner assembled a 10-person committee, including himself, to plan details for the new building.

"The euthanasia rate was a good 80 percent or more with the old one, and now, the adoption rate is that...it completely flipped around."
JoEllen Jacobs

Together they mapped out specific details for the new shelter, which would be built on the existing shelter property.

With the plans for official construction already set in motion, the group stumbled upon another philanthropist. Robin's parents had recently evacuated their home in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. The couple traveled up to Circleville to stay with Robin, their only daughter. Her stepfather, Gene Mattingly, heard about the local project and expressed interest. With previous architectural experience, Mattingly offered to design the new shelter for free.

With everything in place, Partners for Paws gave the check to the Pickaway County commissioners and construction began. After $380,000, the new and improved Pickaway County Dog Shelter opened for business in March 2009. With a quarantine area, 40 cages, an external fence for outdoor playtime and a roomy lobby, the new shelter proved to be a great improvement.

"The main thing is the euthanasia rate was a good 80 percent or more with the old one, and now, the adoption rate is that," JoEllen says. "I mean, it completely flipped around."

The canines' quality of life dramatically improved. With a sky blue roof and open windows, the shelter is inviting. Inside, a poster board propped against the wall displays photos of the adoptable dogs. "Love is a four letter word" is embossed directly above the doorway leading to the animals. As the door swings open, dogs leap with excitement at the sight of Partners for Paws member Rhonda Grubb. Rhonda volunteers at the shelter six days a week, always working side by side with the dogs.

Rows upon rows of cages house adoptable dogs of all shapes, sizes and colors. Barks echo across the shelter and tails wag in hopeful excitement. About 40 dogs await adoptee parents, but for now, the shelter makes a welcoming home. Their eyes shine with a healthy glow and a friendly demeanor. Outside, a fenced-in area allows the dogs to enjoy the fresh air of early fall.

Behind a locked door, a separate holding area cages dogs that aren't yet up for adoption. A stray must be kept in the holding area for at least three days to give an owner a chance to retrieve the dog. Other dogs may need medical treatment before the adoption. In a corner cage, two small Dachshunds huddle shoulder-to-shoulder in the far left corner. They were recently brought into the shelter, and after several days, these dogs will be moved into the adoptable area if they are healthy.

The new and improved shelter is up and running, but Partners for Paws has ongoing responsibilities. With an escalated number of canine residents, sustainability often comes with a price tag. For the facility, Partners for Paws has donated a $142 sweeper, $495 worth of fans, $330 for a pet scale and muzzles, a $430 refrigerator and much more.

Taxpayers cannot help the shelter, and the county simply doesn't have the money, so Partners for Paws continues to fund the facility, often throwing community fundraisers. The local Bob Evans recently sponsored a "Dine to Make a Difference" day and donated 15 percent of each bill to the group. In fall, the nonprofit organization hosted the highly anticipated Wine Tasting event at Slate Run Vineyards. And on the third Monday of each month, Partners for Paws gathers at a local fire station to discuss their latest endeavors.

Partners for Paws has another obligation of dire importance: paying for veterinary services. Sometimes, it's just a quick shot or a round of antibiotics but in times of crisis the group finds a way to pay for emergencies. Many dogs have required a quick rescue or a visit to the doctor, and luckily, Partners for Paws is able to provide them with the needed medical care.

Take Penelope, for instance. On February 14, 2011, a Pekingese mix named Penelope was brought into the shelter. The tiny dog has black fur on both sides and a thick white stripe down her belly. Her disfigured left eye slopes downward. This permanent scar is the only sign that Penelope was once close to death.

Penelope was found in a Circleville resident's

front yard. To this day, no one knows for sure what happened. Both of her back legs lay limply behind her as she dragged herself up to his porch. Luckily, the local resident called the shelter. Rhonda immediately drove Penelope to the vet, who found a puncture in Penelope's left eye. He decided that the eye would have to be removed, but she would regain mobility in her back legs.

During her last visit to the vet, a drug sales representative happened to stop by the office. This young woman couldn't resist Penelope or her story and adopted her. Penelope's story might have ended on that fateful day at the shelter, disabled and homeless, but she was given the chance to have a family.

Partners for Paws has spent about $4,000 on veterinary bills alone, says Linda. But, each month this group of about 20 members rallies this small community together in support of the animals.

"We're all in it for the right reasons, to help the animals," says Robin.

Partners for Paws made a life-altering impact in Pickaway County, which is displayed in the drastically improved adoption rates. Dogs that would have been euthanized are receiving medical treatment and the possibility of a permanent home. A small group with a mighty force, this nonprofit organization found a way to meet its every ambition.

"It really is gratifying and I think it speaks well of the citizens of our county that they would care enough about these unwanted animals that they would jump on board and donate their time and resources to help me with this organization," Jeanie says. "It was a team effort here."

Collecting money, organizing fundraising events and paying the bills all continue in an endless cycle, but there are some cases, like Watson's, that show without a doubt the lasting transformation for a small town in southeastern Ohio. Prior to 2009, Watson would have been euthanized immediately. Partners for Paws didn't let that happen.

The veterinarian couldn't save Watson's right leg, and Partners for Paws paid for the leg amputation that saved his life.

Afterward, he was taken back to the shelter and given special treatment. Three days after his surgery, Samantha Williams happened to stop at the local dog shelter. She saw Watson lying behind the front desk and didn't even notice his missing back leg.

"We had stopped in a couple times and we weren't in any hurry of course and had been popping in just occasionally and there he was, love at first sight," she says.

And just like that, less than a month after the accident, Watson left the shelter for a permanent home. With each passing day, Partners for Paws leaves a permanent paw print on the hearts of Pickaway County families. □

BELOW: Rhonda Grubb, a full-time volunteer at the shelter, walks through the kennels at the Pickaway County Dog Shelter.

HELL on WHEELS

Women find skating sisterhood on and off the track

Written by Audrey Rabalais | Photographed by Patrick Oden

The Hell Betties hold grueling practice sessions at Dow's Rollarena in Nelsonville (left) and a former middle school building in Stewart (right).

The Appalachian Hell Betties break all the rules. The roller derby team practices once a week in Dow's Rollarena where faded yellow posters demand that they skate at a reasonable speed, shall not skate in a reckless manner and act like ladies and gentlemen.

They also disregard the status quo of typical sports practice attire. Watching them fly around the track is like looking through a kaleidoscope. Brightly striped knee-socks extend from four-wheeled skates, some of which are patched with colored duct tape.

Some wear short skirts over tights with a bustier to complete the outfit—almost always in the Hell Betties' official colors of red and black. They also don different names with their derby attire. Each of the ladies picks a derby name that she goes by during bouts, an actual derby competition between two teams.

Team founder Jessica Beckford, whose feisty derby name Madam Kracka Le Whipski contrasts her wide smile and dark, bouncing eyes, chose the name "Hell Betties" as a play on "hillbilly" for this all-female roller derby team. She aimed to create something positive out of a word that can carry a negative connotation.

"I really wanted to focus on the region and community, and I wanted to come up with something that represented the region in general," Jessica says.

She created a Facebook page in October 2010 to see if any women in the Athens area shared her interest. Soon, the page attracted women from all walks of life. The approximately 30 Betties on the current roster range from around 23 to 50 years in age and span a broad range of professions, including nurses, an attorney, a counselor and an adjunct professor. Though they come from different places and wear different uniforms, they all arrive at the Hell Betties hideout where they share sweat, blood and laughter at the end of the day.

"I have never felt closer to another group of people in my entire life," Jessica says.

The group includes everything that comes with each woman—even offspring. Before practice, the girls catch up on family lives and trade funny stories. Some even kick around a ball with the children lucky enough to accompany their moms to practice. The children are then shooed outside to the old courtyard before Coach Sarah Hendrickson drills their moms through baseball slides, skidding stops and blocking.

"Get your butts down! Elbows in!" Sarah yells

BELOW: The team stretches before bout practice on the track of Dow's Rollarena in Nelsonville.

to get the skaters in "derby position," with their hands in front of their chests, skating as if bent over in a chair.

"It should hurt!" she adds.

"It does," quips Erika Guthrie, derby name Dazey Lovedirt, a graduate student at Ohio University. Erika, 32, joined the team in June, but judging from her mouth-guarded smile and inside jokes with the other women one would think that she's known them for a lifetime.

The passion and true camaraderie that runs deep in this group of Appalachian women is visible while they are bouting, running through drills or simply sharing a cigarette. One can't help but join in their laughter, which comes loudly through dark mouthguards; they look like the happiest group of toothless women found in one place.

"The best part about it is most of the people in this group are in my generation," Erika says. "I found a good group of women who are tough; they're badass. Roller derby's cool, man!"

The Hell Betties hope to start bouting in March under an apprenticeship with the Columbus-based Ohio Roller Girls. After a year of apprenticeship and four bouts, the team can become certified by the Women's Flat Track Derby Association and nationally recognized.

As the derby ladies file into Dow's Rollarena every Sunday, they each pay $4 to Helen and Roger Smith, 48-year owners of the arena, who have been watching the Betties bout since the team's conception.

"They started coming to regular skate," Helen says. "Some of them didn't even know how to skate."

The Hell Betties practice on the original flat track of the Dow's Rollarena that was installed in 1952. Most of them get very familiar with the floor once a week. They practice at the former Federal Hocking Middle School building in Stewart twice a week

"Kneecaps on the whistle!" Sarah barks.

Twenty girls genuflect on command, flipping direction when they rise. They do this several times, each whistle blows sooner than the last. They then stretch and begin to bout. A faithful audience cheers on the Betties every week.

"My mom just trampled somebody!" 8-year-old Moss exclaims. He is the son of Rena Loebker, a baker at Crumbs Bakery in Athens.

Rena, a self-professed tomboy with long dreadlocks extending from her helmet, had been looking for a roller derby team for a while before she found the Hell Betties.

ABOVE: Rena Loebker attempts to stem a nosebleed, a typical roller derby battle wound.

"I thought 'no way can I just come out here and skate,'" Rena says. But the Hell Betties roll out the welcome wagon to anyone interested.

"Family" holds this team together, whether at the home or in the rink. For instance, many on the team have a derby wife, a woman on the team with whom someone clicks.

"She becomes your best friend, someone who will hold your hair when you puke and will help you run from the cops," Hell Betties Vice President Amber Young, derby name Vera Venom, says.

At a recent Hell Betties get-together, four derby wives were united, reciting vows from *Down and Derby*, a national resource to all things roller derby.

Even if they do not have a derby wife, the Hell Betties take care of each other outside of the flat track.

When a team member is sick or injured, at least a few of the girls will show up at her house

with food, so the family does not have to cook.

In such a rough sport, injuries can be common.

During a recent practice bout, a Hell Betty broke her ankle. Within seconds, the team removed their derby helmets and put on the others they juggle daily: nurse, mother, wife and caregiver. She was carried to a car and on the way to the hospital within minutes.

"It's really amazing, the undying support that everybody gives each other," Jessica says.

The love spreads beyond those on skates. The Hell Betties have gathered local support because they are working, participating members of the surrounding Athens area.

"We have an amazing amount of community support," Jessica says. "This community has really welcomed us with open arms."

Tony's, an Athens bar, sponsors the Hell Betties. At a recent promotional event there, one of the girls was photographed and featured in the paper holding a Pabst Blue Ribbon.

Soon after, PBR contacted the team about becoming a sponsor. The company refers to the derby girls as the PBR ambassadors.

"As soon as we put out there what we wanted to do, local businesses were coming to us," Jessica says.

They are hearing their team name tossed around within the community more as the months progress. The Hell Betties are repaying the favor.

"I really wanted it to be a community-based program where it was mutually beneficial for us and local business," Jessica says.

The team has organized several fundraisers in only one year.

Recently they raised over $300 for the Athens High School sports facilities that were damaged after a tornado swept through last year. They also volunteer at My Sister's Place, an organization that provides services to domestic violence victims in Athens, Hocking and Vinton counties.

"One of the things I think is really awesome and impressive about this group of women is that they're do-ers," Erika says. "There's administrative tasks, PR, fundraising, and they're doing all of it and they are kicking ass."

The Hell Betties can find a role for anyone interested in having a hand in derby, even if they cannot bout.

Judith Winner, derby name Dame Von Pain, is training to become the team's referee, neon whistles and all.

"It's sort of my derby retirement plan," Judith says. Though she is one of the older women on the team, she easily keeps up with the team as the women fly around the track.

After watching any bout, the need for referees is apparent. There are 100 pages worth of rules that Judith must commit to memory.

She must quickly recall any given one amidst the chaos of jammers moving like bumper cars through a pack of blockers. This is why there are at least seven referees at a bout.

"All the people my age are like 'Are you crazy? Aren't you fragile and do you have insurance?'" Mary Ann Crocker says.

Forty-nine-year-old Mary Ann, a real estate agent and postal worker, joined the team in June after hearing about it through her local newspaper. She is one of the lucky few beginners who did not break a tailbone within her first two practices.

Many Hell Betties members have not been on skates since their youth, and some are quickly reminded when their feet fly out from under them.

Though many would feel defeated, a woman meant for derby shows more grit than tears. Those who hit the flat track are determined to heal so they can get back on skates.

BELOW: Rena Loebker's son, Moss, attends almost every practice, cheering on his skating mom.

"The fact that they keep returning is amazing to me," Jessica says. "They are just as passionate to be taking it easy for the couple weeks that it takes and still coming to every practice to absorb what they can so they can participate."

The team hopes to grow and add even more variety to the rough and tumble group of all sizes, ages, professions and experiences.

"The lost population of Athens can find their place in roller derby—the population that hasn't been thought of as athletic or competitive or even brave enough to be on a derby team," Erika says.

The newest additions to the team stumble through practice. The Betties make sure they are properly padded before they begin.

After several loud crashes, it is clear why they tote a bag of extra helmets, kneepads and wristguards to each practice.

They also bring more than enough encouragement, which seems to benefit the new women more than the padding.

They know they are welcome in the Hell Betties hideout.

"A lot of people equate finding roller derby to finding religion," Jessica says. "I really feel that this has fundamentally changed me as a person forever."

Some of the women commute from as far away as Lancaster to skate, slam and laugh off stress acquired outside the worn Rollarena or the musty old practice gym.

"If I've had an intense day, I come in, I skate with these girls, I feel better," Erika says. "It's just alive."

Every practice and bout ends with the women huddled in a circle, closer together than they are in the blocking pack, with their hands raised high.

On the count of three, the hands come down with a resounding "Hell yeah, Hell Betties!" □

ABOVE: Mary Ann Crocker ices her tailbone during derby practice at the former Federal Hocking Middle School building in Stewart.

HOME-FIELD ADVANTAGE

How two Michigan alums raised a family of Buckeyes

Written by **Justin Williams** | Photographed by **Maddie Meyer**

Hope Boren is a nervous wreck.

The constant bouncing of her legs rattles the cold metal of Tiger Stadium's indigo painted bleachers. Her hands are frantically running through her hair, eyes darting back and forth between the field and the scoreboard, a countdown to misery and despair.

The Pickerington High School Central Tigers have never lost to the Pickerington High School North Panthers—but that could all change right now. This is the fifth time the schools have faced off on the gridiron since they split due to overcrowded classrooms in 2003, and North looks poised to finally nab a victory in the inter-town faceoff, leading 21-17 with 1:03 clicking away on the gameclock.

Central has the ball, but must travel the length of the field to score and save themselves from months of local ridicule. Both sides of the stadium are packed. Students, teachers, friends, parents and grandparents all stand on their feet—high school football at its finest. Kids dream about these games while dozing off in class or burning out of the parking lot in their handed-down pickups. This is what Midwestern, small town rivalries are all about. Quintessential Americana. And no one seems to hate it more than Hope Boren.

It isn't enough that Central has played big brother to North for the past few years. It isn't enough that her son Jacoby is having a great game, opening holes on the offensive line so big you could stuff a Sequoia through. It isn't enough that this matchup will be memorable regardless of who finishes victorious. Hope wants Central to win—needs Central to win—because that's just what mothers do. They want absolute happiness for their kids, whether the cause is

Hope Boren talks with family before the Ohio State vs. Colorado game outside of Ohio Stadium, where they stand before every home game as Zach and the team head toward the field.

ABOVE: Hope Boren prepares food before Jacoby's homecoming game against Newark High School.

important, trivial or somewhere in between.

After a few nice plays by Central toward their endzone, the ball now sits a mere 16 yards from paydirt, but with only 40.7 seconds remaining. Central snaps the ball and the quarterback drops in the pocket, avoiding North defenders and impending defeat as the clock ticks. You can sense every muscle in Hope's body tense up. You can see her holding her breath. It's then that the Central running back skirts out of the backfield, hauling in the slowest moving bloop pass ever thrown, before turning his eyes up-field and racing to the corner pylon.

Touchdown. The remaining 35 seconds are all but meaningless as Central takes the game 24-21. Half the stadium erupts while the other deflates. A sea of purple rushes the field. Pickerington remains Tiger Country. Hope hugs her daughter, hugs her husband, texts and calls her other two sons, spreading the good news. She waves to Jacoby on the field, hugs the person beside her, grabs the hand of the person in front of her, claps, whistles and hollers with joy.

And finally, she exhales.

Boren is a household name in Greater Columbus and spreads to the far corners of Ohio. That's what happens when one of the nation's premier college football programs recruits three brothers. Mike and Hope Boren lay claim to this trinity of offspring, all of whom belong to the Ohio State Buckeyes family. Zach is the only current member, a prototypical, thick-bodied fullback built like a 6-foot fire hydrant. Justin—a 6'3", 325 lb., wide-bodied beast of a man—graduated last year and currently plays for the NFL's Baltimore Ravens. Jacoby, standing in the same broad-shouldered frame as Justin, committed to

join the Buckeyes next season following his senior year at Central. But what does it take to raise a trio of Buckeyes? Two Wolverines.

Mike and Hope met as student athletes at the University of Michigan in 1981—the very same Michigan that serves as *Capulet* to Ohio State's *Montague* in one of college sports' most prominent rivalries. Mike grew up on Columbus' east side, a big-time linebacker at Eastmoor High School and die-hard Buckeyes fan. But when Ohio State failed to offer him a football scholarship, he opted for the maize and blue of the Wolverines.

"My room was scarlet and grey growing up," Mike says. "But then, I hated them."

Hope grew up outside of Cleveland, running varsity track at Michigan while Mike was working his way to the sixth spot on the school's all-time tackles list.

After an injury during his senior season derailed any potential NFL aspirations, Mike took up work in operations management after college, married Hope in 1986, started a family when Justin was born in 1988 and settled down in Pickerington soon after. All three Boren boys were born almost exactly three years apart (Zach in '91, Jacoby in '94), with each weighing in at 8 pounds, 3 ounces, a fitting precursor to the mirroring success they would one day achieve on the football field.

Justin brought the Boren name to the national stage, ostensibly a result of his NFL career. In actuality though, it's his unique role in the Michigan-Ohio State rivalry that got his name out there. Both schools have had football programs in place since the late 1800s. In that time, Justin Boren is the only college football player to ever transfer teams from Michigan to Ohio State.

Mike and Hope raised their kids in Michigan apparel from diapers, despite living in Columbus. But when it came time for Justin—one of the top recruited offensive linemen in the country during high school—to decide where he would be suiting up on Saturdays, it ultimately came down to two intriguing options.

"It was so close, it wasn't even funny," Justin says. "It was probably the hardest decision I ever had to make. I really liked Ohio State, I really liked all the coaches. It just came down to the fact that I had been going to Michigan games for so long."

The eldest Boren excelled during his first two years there, but a coaching change led to a desire to leave Michigan, and possibly quit football entirely. That was when Ohio State reentered the picture, still interested in what Justin had to offer out on the gridiron. And in spite of the torrid history between the two programs, in spite of the rivalry and the fact that one would be insane to play both sides of that fence, Justin defied rationality and seized the opportunity.

"She was so instrumental in raising the kids and being a wife. That's all Hope. Hope did that."
Mike Boren

"I got hate mail, death threats, all kinds of crazy stuff when that happened," Justin recalls. "But I can honestly say, I never looked back after transferring to Ohio State. It was the best decision I could have made, and I'd make it a thousand more times if I was put in that position again."

Ironically enough, all of this was taking place right at the end of Zach's junior year at Central, during his college search. He didn't have quite the same recruiting experience as his older brother and was getting more serious looks as a college baseball prospect. But when Ohio State came calling late in the spring of 2008, Zach's interest began to peak. Justin's verdict a few weeks later simply helped seal the deal.

"Once Justin decided not to go back to Michigan and to come to Ohio State, Zach was pretty much going there, too," Mike says. "I mean, Zach obviously wasn't gonna go to Michigan."

Justin picked up where he left off in his remaining two years at Ohio State, spring-boarding himself to a spot on the Baltimore Ravens practice squad. Zach, on the other hand, was forced to transition from linebacker to fullback following injuries to the offensive side. He's been starting there ever since.

And now Jacoby, the youngest son, has decided to follow suit, committing to play offensive line for the Buckeyes next fall. Three brothers, all recruited to play big-time college football; that alone is one for the storybooks. But three brothers, who grew up wearing maize and blue, shouting "Hail to Victors" and watching Charles Woodson light up "The Big House," committing

Zach, Hope, Mike, Jacoby and Kallie Boren (counter-clockwise from top) watch the Baltimore Ravens game together to support Justin, who plays on the Ravens' practice squad.

to Ohio State? That's unprecedented.

And lest we forget Papa Boren, the man who played for the Wolverines under legendary head coach Bo Schembechler. How could he possibly sleep at night?

"I didn't care, really," says Mike, so calm and nonchalant that you know it must be true. "It's whatever is best for my kids."

Even still, he can't hide the wry smirk that creeps across his face.

"It is a vicious circle though."

Hope Boren pauses. She has the slightest hint of a smile on her lips as she searches for the right words, her eyes drifting to the ceiling of her spacious home in northwest Fairfield County. The house sits on 20 acres of flat, open, beautiful Pickerington countryside, with a pond around back and an entryway reminiscent of walking into the Horseshoe at Ohio State, albeit on a much smaller scale. It's the fruit of the Boren parents' labors, with Mike owning a few businesses and Hope working in local schools as a physical therapist and certified athletic trainer. Inside, tiny brown and white Shichons named Bailey and Buckeye dart around the house as if it's a giant pinball machine. Walls are lined with frames of photos and game-worn jerseys, the fridge an ever-depleting stash of milk and sports drinks.

"They weren't total pains in the ass," Hope blurts out, finally settling on an answer, the smile now in full bloom across her cheeks.

She's talking about her sons, as only she and her husband could know them. Not as football stars or big, brawny athletes, but simply as her children. These are the times when you see the Borens for who they truly are. Sure, football defines them in many ways. But so does family. A perfect mix of the two.

"Super competitive is the way I would describe us," Justin says by phone, driving back to his Baltimore apartment after practice one afternoon. "I mean we were competitive in everything, from who could have the best jump into the swimming pool or we would time each other on four wheelers. Everything was just competitive. It was crazy, and it still is."

Imagine what it must have been like for a little sister.

"We planned for three, and we were hoping that Jacoby was a girl," Mike says. "We thought

about it, and we were like, 'What do we do?' We could have another boy. But we just figured we would go ahead and try it one more time."

They ended up getting their wish with Kallie, currently 12 years old and just as much a part of the whirlwind as her older brothers.

"She was definitely brought into the competitive side of stuff because we boys are so competitive, so that's the only thing she knew," Zach says. "Ever since she was young, that's all she's ever been around is competitive people."

That, and football.

"We always wanted to play," Zach says. "When we were younger we would always be throwing the football around and playing football in the house. And I'm sure my mom will tell you, she wasn't the happiest person about it, because we would break a whole bunch of stuff and put holes in the wall tackling each other."

It's not as if Hope had much choice. Whether it was football and baseball with the boys or softball with Kallie, it was obvious that these kids would be following their parents' footsteps.

"Honestly, it was just all sports all the time, since they were little," Hope says. But she's also quick to acknowledge how it brought them closer as a unit. "We are either doing stuff together as a family or split up as a family. Always."

She's a bit modest, of course, as moms tend to be. Sports might have been the collective pastime, but it's the dedication of Mike and Hope over the years that strengthened this family bond.

"My parents are the most supportive parents in the world," Justin says. "They support us no matter what happens."

"It was definitely hard on my parents, having to make it to all our games, but they did a great job with it," says Zach. "And I can honestly say that one of them was always at each of my games. They never missed a single one."

He's right. It was hard on them. There were endless loads of laundry, millions of miles driven between games, practices and events, and infinite pounds of food just to keep them going. But it was worth it.

"Hopefully we'll have some grandkids fairly soon, because by the time these kids are done and it all stops, it will be weird," Mike says. "I don't know what we're gonna do."

But what about now? How did they get these three boys to where they are today?

"That's our role, and it's very important. You've got to be willing to run around," Hope says. "We'll have plenty of time for each other," she continues, motioning to Mike. "We don't regret it."

Seriously? No regrets?

"Hmmm," she murmurs, again looking to the ceiling in search of an answer. "I guess I wouldn't have dressed them in Michigan clothes so much."

Zach Boren—the smallest of the Boren boys, mind you—stands 6'1", 255 lbs. His main job on the football field is crashing into other men as hard as he possibly can. He's one of those kids that, if you asked him to run through a brick wall, he'd take off without even thinking twice about it. And he'd probably be able to do it, too.

But it doesn't change how he feels about his mother.

"I'm definitely a mama's boy. I always have been," Zach says. "I always go back to my mom whenever I need advice or something. It's always mom first."

He's not alone.

"She's my biggest supporter," Jacoby says.

"She is a super strong woman. She was always there," Justin adds. "She was the one making sure everything ran smoothly in the house, and she's great. I never dreamed she would have flown out here to Baltimore to help me set everything up, but that's what she did. That's just the kind of person she is."

These are the comments that serve as some validation for all her years of hard work, the infinite hours of nurturing, worrying and nagging that shaped these boys into men. And the one who knows her best? The man who was right alongside her the whole time.

"She's great," Mike says about his wife of 25 years. "She was so instrumental in raising the kids and being a wife. That's all Hope. Hope did that."

It's obvious what this woman means to her family. But how does Hope Boren account for her children's successes and the unbreakable bond of her family?

"Did you ever read the book *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell? It kind of explains that whole idea," she says. "I do believe that there are a lot of

kids out there with a lot of potential and ability that never make it or get noticed because they didn't have the right support or maybe didn't have the right opportunities. There are so many things that have to go right along the way that are out of our control."

But it's getting late. She still has to run to the store to pick up a few things. She has to help Kallie make cookies for Spanish class.

She has Jacoby's game tomorrow evening, followed by a day of traveling to Zach's game after that. She's pretty sure Kallie has softball on Sunday, but she'll have to check the schedule, and Justin is flying home the next weekend during his bye week.

"It's a matter of being thankful my kids got those opportunities," she says while straightening up the coffee table, still seemingly oblivious to her own contributions. "I appreciate all of it. I'm just so grateful."

Well, the feeling is certainly mutual. Just ask anyone at the Boren dinner table. □

ABOVE: Hope Boren congratulates Jacoby following a win against Groveport-Madison, as Pickerington High School Central pushed its undefeated conference record to 4-0.

Freedom Guide

Mayor revives stories of Underground Railroad and local history

Written by
Allison Soderberg

Photographed by
Megan Westervelt

On a warm evening in mid September, 62-year-old Mike Gerlach leads his flock of nearly 20 tourists along a path once long forgotten. The tall trees shade one side while a lush green field brushes along the other. The sun shines through the trees, and leaves cascade onto the ground in layers of green, yellow and red.

Not far up ahead, Leading Creek hums tranquilly and pushes sharply right, guiding followers on a path parallel to the river.

It forges on through a forest overgrown by thick foliage and accented by the yellows and purples of wildflowers.

As he walks ahead, Mike tells a nearly 200-year-old story, taking his followers on a journey through the eyes of a young slave, frightened and alone. A teenager running from a life defined by oppression and servitude, she knows neither where she is going nor whom to trust, but the promise of freedom fuels her journey. She continues along the Leading, hiding under brush and rock ledges when necessary, always with the echoes of barking dogs and heavy-footed slave catchers trailing her steps.

Although those footsteps crumbled the leaves centuries ago, they are still heard today throughout Middleport whenever Mike tells one of his stories. From the perspective of travelers passing through the town, it may appear to have all the similarities of any other small town of some 2,500 people with its quaint houses and modest churches. However, tucked away in the rolling hills of southern Ohio, Middleport has something that makes it one-of-a-kind: Mike, the mayor who doubles as the town's tour guide.

He possesses a natural storytelling ability, a distinct quality that is rare to find. One story reminds him of another, which leads into a few more, and in the end he has painted his listener's reality with images of the past. It is a talent captured during his youth that he takes with him each time he gives the tour of Middleport's Underground Railroad passage.

"Now, you have to think as they would back

ABOVE: Mike Gerlach retells stories of escaped slaves who used this trail as their path to freedom in the early 19th century.

then…you can imagine (the scenery) isn't much different than what it looked like back then," he begins.

Sunlight reflects off his glasses, enhancing the excited glow in his eyes. His 6-foot-2 frame hangs ever so slightly at the shoulders as he walks along, seemingly content with the present.

He depicts two slaves wading precariously through the low summer waters of the Leading. An abolitionist, perhaps Hamilton Kerr or Adam Smith, awaits their arrival on the other side, ready to take flight along the water. Slave catchers hired by the slave-owning Wagner family track the pair tirelessly, and Mike continues on with stirring tales of captures, gunfights, jailbreaks and deception.

In Mike's mind, he sees exactly what he describes to his tourists, as if the action is unfolding before his very eyes.

"I don't really see the audience because if I'm seeing it in my mind while I'm telling it, my audience seems to visualize it better," he explains.

His wife, Debbie, sits next to him on their antique sofa, smiling and nodding in agreement. A retired elementary school teacher, she is by no means a stranger to his stories. While her love of history certainly developed within the marriage, Debbie always held a soft spot for storytelling in her English classes. Together, Mike and Debbie's shared passion for teaching has left an imprint on hundreds of students' lives.

While a teacher at Meigs High School during the 1970s, Mike began compiling information about Middleport's Underground Railroad system.

"Originally, I was doing this for my classes, so I would be able to tell kids what was happening with the first settlers," he says. Mike was always looking for that interesting hook to perk his students' interests.

As a child, Mike's zeal for history fostered itself through the influences of his family and teachers. He recalls his grandfather taking him to historical sites where Indian massacres took place, and his first grade teacher vividly describing Morgan's Raid rampaging over the soil of where her own farm is now located.

"My whole life it seems like I was imagining about history. Even when I was playing, I was reenacting history in my mind. I guess that makes me a geek," he laughs.

"He lives and breathes history," Debbie adds with a chuckle.

Mike knew at a young age that teaching would be his calling in life. It was the chance to inspire kids about history in the same way he was inspired by it: through storytelling, along with a dash of his goofy humor.

Tara Gerlach, his oldest daughter and an athletic trainer at the University of Rio Grande, recalls having her father for two history classes in high school.

"How's that for punishment?" she jokes.

She and her younger sister, Allison, grew up with family vacations that unknowingly became humorous historical lessons from her father.

These lessons cultivated her own love of history and travel.

"(My family and I) like to tease that he is never serious about anything, which isn't actually true," Tara laughs. "He knows how to make these things more interesting by looking at the fun or funny aspects, which is much more interesting than pure facts."

After 32 years of teaching, Mike retired from Meigs High School in 2004, having taught even the grandchildren of previous students.

A few years later, he was encouraged by his peers throughout the town to run for office. Putting aside his retirement plans, Mike was elected mayor in 2008.

This accomplishment opened up the possibilities for new local historical projects, including improving the Village Hall and establishing historical markers for local military heroes.

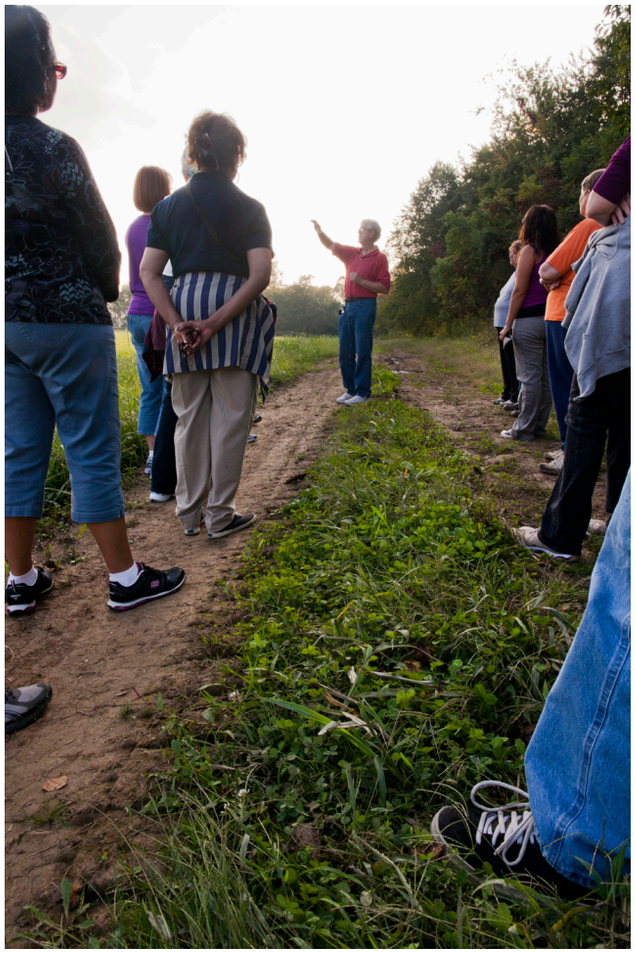
In the summer of 2011, the chance to continue his historical storytelling presented itself. The University of Rio Grande was giving a seminar about the Underground Railroad throughout the area of southern Ohio.

Mike contacted the university and told them about the Underground Railroad in Middleport. Unlike various other small towns with speculated stories of the Underground Railroad, Middleport has the documents to prove the route existed. The excitement slowly began to sink in that this was an opportunity to do what he loved and create tourism in town at the same time.

Once the village was given permission to clear the path, the first tour took place at the start of the summer of 2011. It was a sensation, attracting 25 to 30 visitors from all over the state of Ohio.

"It was after that when we decided to open it up to the townspeople," Mike says.

The second time, nearly 60 people showed up for the tour.



BELOW: Mike Gerlach leads a group on a walking tour along the same trail that slaves used as the Underground Railroad.

Many were parents of students he had taught in high school. After three tours during the summer of 2011, the Underground Railroad experience in Middleport was a success. The most recent tour on September 22 captured a county-wide audience of more than 20 people, both young and old.

Teresa Shiflet met Mike at a town function and was informed about his tours then. She and her 14-year-old son, Matthew, traveled from their home in Rutland to attend the September tour. She recalls how his captivating stories inspired her.

"Being that we live in the area, I wanted to see, maybe, where they passed over from West Virginia into Ohio," Teresa explains. "You could just picture what was happening, and he made me wonder, 'Could a slave have passed through my yard? Touched the tree we sit under sometimes?' It was such an amazing story."

For the most part, word-of-mouth is the tour's greatest source of advertisement. "People have been very appreciative. It seems to give them some pride, and that's great," Mike says.

Becky English, a resident of Middleport since 1968, was so fascinated by the history of her town that she took the tour both times it was open to the public. She holds a strong belief that the Middleport community should learn about their history, and emphasizes this importance for the town's black demographic as well.

"If you are going to find out who you really are, you have to look at the warts of it as well as the pretty smile."
Mike Gerlach

"Those were our forefathers before us," she says. "We should know what took place back in those days."

While the tour drew attention from its community, it also provided a chance to attract outsiders.

"At the same time, part of what we're doing is kind of a means to an end," Mike explains. "Here's something that can really make Middleport a special place to come to. Sure, the town has a lot of things it needs, but at the same time (it) has a lot of things that make it special," he boasts.

Mike's history lessons don't stop at the Underground Railroad. After trudging the winding trail, he drives his followers into town and expounds on more than 150 years of local history, supporting his lessons with old pictures of the robed Ku Klux Klan members who lived in the area and with examples of racial inequality within his own life experiences. "If you are going to find out who you really are, you have to look at the warts of it as well as the pretty smile," Mike says.

While the documented route of the Underground Railroad garners the most attention, Mike's other lessons encompass a much larger concept of racial discrimination. Beyond the historical facts, it may be that a subtle message is being sent through the crowd in the end.

"I think there is a lesson there," Mike considers, "that could be true for anybody who takes the tour. It's that we have to be really careful because it's easy for those prejudices to come back again."

The cliché saying that "history repeats itself" may in fact ring true. "It may not be a perfect repeat, but it can happen," Mike says.

Mike and Debbie have many plans for the tour in the coming years. He envisions getting some community involvement with the tour and presenting it as a lantern excursion in the evening.

Like an excited child, Mike lights up as he imagines boomboxes playing the eager sounds of dogs and African-American community members passing in front of tours in authentic costumes.

In 2013, the Ohio Underground Railroad Association plans to visit Middleport. This will bring attention to the tour and help Mike develop promotional strategies.

He also has hopes of creating a detailed pamphlet, allowing people to walk the tour at their own pace, though he will never turn down the opportunity to guide it himself.

"I am retired, so as a general rule if you give me a few days' notice I can take you down there whenever," he says.

In the final leg of his tour through history, Mike sits his audience on the bleachers of the high school football stadium and recalls racial discrimination during his high school years. Perched on a railing in front of the crowd, his picturesque image is that of a storyteller.

His yearbook is held high in front of him. Facing the group as he points his finger at the pages, Mike guides his listeners' eyes over the pictures, enrapturing them with his tales of the past.

"I've heard all the stories multiple times, but every time he does it I'm in awe of how much he has in that head of his," Debbie says proudly.

Middleport has some wonderful stories to offer and a mayor whose passion and gift for telling them resonates through his every word.

Although his love of stories is apparent, it is a love of his town that reigns above the rest.

"These are not my stories," Mike asserts to his audience. "They are the town's." □

ABOVE: Mike Gerlach retells the story of the first black homecoming queen at Middleport High School.

Main Street Success

Independent Pomeroy pharmacy keeps small-town atmosphere

BELOW: In business since 1946, Swisher and Lohse Pharmacy has always offered personal service.

Written and photographed by
Patrick Oden

As discussions of Main Street versus Wall Street permeate living rooms, workplaces and social gatherings, Americans cannot help but realize that small businesses are being laid asunder.

Swisher and Lohse Pharmacy may be one exception. Long before Main Street conjured an image of the average American, Swisher and Lohse Pharmacy opened its doors at 112 E. Main St. in Pomeroy.

That was 1946.

However, times have changed.

Pomeroy's current population has dwindled to fewer than 2,000, the median annual income is less than $20,000 and two major pharmacy chains have opened up within two miles of Swisher and Lohse.

Despite these challenges, this little independent pharmacy continues to thrive.

Patrons attribute Swisher and Lohse's success to its customer service.

LEFT: A tugboat transports empty barges along the Ohio River alongside Pomeroy's Main Street.

"They try to help you out as much as they can," says Bill Heeter, 71, of Pomeroy. "Most of the time I don't even have to tell them what I'm after."

Though the number of independently owned pharmacies in the U.S. has declined by half over the past 20 years, Swisher and Lohse is holding its own. Nestled in Pomeroy's riverfront, this community drugstore calls to a day when the milkman left glass bottles next to the morning paper and the pharmacist knew your name. □

ABOVE: Wendy Halar brings her granddaughter to pharmacist Chuck Riffle and shows small bites on the child's skin that occurred while fishing.

LEFT: Medicine bottles sit displayed on shelves.

FOOD

It's in the Sauce

Boondocks BBQ heats up the grill

Written by
Kirstin Allinson

Photographed by
Matthew Hatcher

"Warning: You are about to eat the world's best barbecue." These words on a sign outside The Boondocks BBQ & Grill are no understatement. Delicious homemade food, combined with a homey and inviting atmosphere, creates the perfect night out in McConnelsville.

Inside, the sweet scent of barbecue hangs in the air as you are seated at one of 12 handmade wooden tables and benches. Classic rock plays in the background while the owners chat with customers. From vintage Elvis records to Ohio State University football jerseys, the decorations on the walls make you feel at home in Bobby and Maria Burdette's kitchen.

The Burdettes opened The Boondocks BBQ & Grill, a friendly, family-owned restaurant in Morgan County, in December 2007.

Since then, business has kept this down-to-earth couple on their toes as word spread about the restaurant's food.

"It's been amazing. There are days we can't keep up, and that's a good problem to have," Maria says.

Word-of-mouth quickly led to national attention when The Food Network discovered The Boondocks in 2009. The restaurant was considered for inclusion on the television show *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*.

"They contacted us because the name kept popping up. It had a cool little ring to it and people seemed to enjoy the atmosphere and the food," Bobby says.

"It was a great experience to have them in here and to have that kind of success this early in our career," Maria adds.

The Boondocks' goal is summed up by its motto: Good food for great people at the best prices.

"It's kind of corny, but that's what we really do strive for," Maria says. "We try to focus on your overall experience being the best that it can be."

Bobby's barbecue sauce makes The Boondocks' ribs and pulled pork a local favorite and has won multiple awards in national competitions. Start a meal off with a plate of warm, gooey Mozzarella Skewers or Louisiana Crab Cakes, complete with secret seasoning. The Baby Back Ribs are tender and drenched in Sweet, Spicy or

BELOW: Boondocks BBQ & Grill co-owner Bobby Burdette prepares an order in the kitchen.

Memphis BBQ sauce, and the Chicken Alfredo Pasta is the perfect dish for any Italian food lover.

The Burdettes are like family to many McConnelsville locals, including Ralph and Lynn Smith. The Smiths have been eating at The Boondocks since the restaurant opened its doors.

"We like that it's very down-to-earth and not fussy," Lynn says. "You can just come in your jeans and T-shirt."

Out-of-towners feel right at home too.

"I live in Columbus, and when I come down here to visit we always come here and I always look forward to it," says Kyle Myers, Lynn's brother.

Bobby received his training at Hocking College and the American Culinary Institute in New York City and went to Ohio University for business. He was also a cook and dietitian for the Ohio Army National Guard in McConnelsville for eight years.

Maria graduated from Muskingum University with degrees in business and child development. After living and working in Columbus for a few years, Bobby and Maria decided to return to their Southeastern Ohio roots and fulfill their dream of opening their own restaurant.

Both Bobby and Maria grew up in the region and hope that their business can strengthen McConnelsville and the surrounding area. Deana Clark, director of Morgan County Convention and Visitors Bureau, is grateful for the Burdettes' hard work and commitment to the community.

"They could probably go somewhere else, open up a restaurant and have more business because of population," Deana says.

The years have flown by for the Burdettes, and they are grateful to everyone who has traveled to The Boondocks. The couple has created a flavor that rivals any big city restaurant.

"It's very simple," Maria says, smiling. "We are what we are. It works, and it's getting the job done." □

ABOVE: The Rev. Arnold and Myra VanHorn of Cambridge order their meals from waitress Amanda Lane of McConnelsville.

BELOW: A favorite local dish includes a BBQ Pulled Pork sandwich with a side of sweet potato fries.

on SoutheastOhioMagazine.com

Southeast Ohio lives beyond the print words through southeastohiomagazine.com. To bring our web content to you, we're featuring "The Gourmet Peddler," a story about Vinton County's Mary Reynolds and her traveling kitchen. Stop by our website to find other web exclusives.

–Ryan Joseph, Web Editor

The Gourmet Peddler

A traveling kitchen cooks up success

Written by
Hannah Croft

Photographed by
Jennifer Reed

In McArthur lies a hidden gem of gourmet food. Located in a little green traveling kitchen, The Gourmet Peddler sets up shop from 10 a.m. to sellout every Tuesday through Friday along South Market Street at the old Steer Inn location. The traveling kitchen gives customers a different kind of lunch.

Mary Reynolds, known around town as Chef Mary, cooks up everything she serves from scratch and with as many local ingredients as possible. Her menu features seasonal goodies such as pumpkin cheesecake and local favorites like her delicious corn bread salad.

Cooking with fresh food comes with some challenges, such as products' shorter shelf life and a daily dedication to getting up early to prepare the food. "To me fresh is made that day," Mary says. So, she gets up at 3 a.m. during the week to get the soup going for that day or to start slicing up the local produce she uses.

"There's a big difference between stuff that's made fresh and something that has so many preservatives in it, you could eat it six months from today," Mary says. The Gourmet Peddler is trying to show people that they can have quality food from local produce.

Obviously passionate about her work, Chef Mary hopes to keep expanding her traveling kitchen into the old Steer Inn restaurant with a woodland-style shelter. She hopes to be able to not only give her customers delicious dishes, but also offer them a friendly environment to sit and eat in. For now though, the food definitely seems to be enough of a draw. □

ABOVE: Mary Reynolds and her traveling kitchen give McArthur residents a fresh option for lunchtime meals.

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Scruffy, a full-grown beagle and terrier mix, jumps up to greet visitors at the Pickaway County Dog Shelter in Circleville. The new shelter has more than 40 cages for dogs, compared to the mere nine the old shelter had (see page 18). | Photographed by Susannah Kay.